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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon joined an overwhelming bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives to pass legislation to improve benefits and services for America's veterans.

"Congress has a duty to honor our veterans not just with our words but with our deeds," said Rep. Melancon. **"I was proud to join both Democrats and Republicans today in passing legislation that will provide our courageous veterans with the resources they have earned and deserve."**

Legislation passed by the House of Representatives today addresses some of the new challenges facing veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and includes:

- **Traumatic Brain Injury/Rural Veterans Outreach (H.R. 2199):** Ensures that our veterans are properly screened for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI, the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) and, if diagnosed, receive the appropriate treatment. More than half of combat casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan have associated brain injuries, often due to improvised explosive devices.

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- Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to screen veterans for TBI;
- Calls for a comprehensive program of long-term care for post-acute TBI rehabilitation;
- Establishes a TBI transition office at each of the 21 polytrauma network sites nationwide;
- Creates a TBI veteran health registry; and
- Expands VA resources to provide rural communities with "mobile vet centers" for

mental health services and benefits outreach.

- **Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act (H.R. 612):** Extends the period of eligibility for health care for combat service in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge or release. The bill is meant to address mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, which may not be evident right after a veteran's discharge from service. This will also provide veterans who might be denied health care due to the Bush Administration enrollment ban policy, an additional period of time to gain access to VA health care.

- **Veterans Outreach Improvement Act (H.R. 67):** Allows the VA to partner with state and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families in ensuring they receive the benefits for which they are eligible and assist them in completing their benefits claims. Federal grants would be directed to states with large and growing populations of veterans. This measure is supported by: Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and takes another step in fulfilling our promises in the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century.

- **Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits Act (H.R. 2239):** Extends eligibility for rehabilitation benefits from the Veterans' Affairs Department to current members of the armed forces who are hospitalized or are receiving outpatient medical care, have a disability of at least 10% incurred or aggravated while on active duty, and who are likely to be discharged from the service due to that disability.

- **Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R. 1470):** Requires that chiropractic care and services be provided to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers within four years.

This Congress, Rep. Melancon has supported legislation to honor veterans by improving veterans' health care, strengthening benefits for our men and women in uniform today, and providing long overdue benefits for the veterans and military retirees who have already served. Congress is fighting to increase veterans' health care and benefits programs by nearly \$12 billion, including nearly \$2 billion for veterans in the Iraq supplemental, which will be voted on in the House in the next few days.

"America's veterans have risked their lives to secure our nation and our way of life,"
Rep. Melancon added.
"We will never forget their service and sacrifice."

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